

Vocalics and Repartee

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss more methods of non-verbal communication that can be impacted by culture. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Vocalics
2. Repartee and Turn-Taking
3. Vocalics and Repartee in Conflict

1. Vocalics

Vocalics refers to tone and volume. It can also apply to non-word communication, meaning filler words such as “um” that we use in English to take up space.

As with other forms of communication, different cultures have different meanings about what is appropriate in the way we use sound.

Even though vocalics is focused on verbal sound, it is included in the category of non-verbal communication because it applies to the tone and volume of speech as opposed to the meaning.

As you know, volume refers to how loud you are speaking; tone can either be high or low, as well as slow or fast.



TERM TO KNOW

Vocalics

The communication style which uses tone of voice and non-word sounds as symbols.

2. Repartee and Turn-Taking

Repartee refers to turn-taking, or the etiquette at play in a conversation between two people or a group.

This **turn-taking** is short, in more of a fast back-and-forth style; however, there are also styles in which one person speaks for a while and finishes with a declarative statement before the other person feels it's appropriate to answer.

Some cultures use an overlapping style in which people will speak over one another, and that is considered appropriate.

How we take turns in conversation can be anything from waiting for someone to finish a statement before speaking to a rapid turn-taking or overlapping style.



THINK ABOUT IT

Do you prefer turn-taking or overlapping? Is it the same for all groups, or do you use a different style of repartee with colleagues than with your immediate family? How do you adapt when you find yourself in conversation with someone who uses the opposite repartee style?



TERMS TO KNOW

Repartee

Literally a form of quick wit; in communication style, a short turn-taking, "back and forth" style of conversation (as opposed to a long-turn taking style).

Turn-Taking/Interruption

The pattern of conversation assumed to be proper in a culture, ranging from rapid exchange of statements and permissibility of interrupting another's speech, to long declarative statements by one speaker which must be completed before another is "allowed" to speak.

3. Vocalics and Repartee in Conflict

When people from different cultures who interpret things differently come together, miscommunication and conflict due to differences in vocalics and repartee can sometimes arise.

IN CONTEXT

Say you are negotiating a contract or reaching some decision that is necessary for your business. You may be speaking to someone from a country that uses an overlapping style of conversation. There are very few breaks and almost no silence because people all talk at once. As someone from the United States, you may tend to see this as rude or disrespectful.

However, your behavior is based on the culture in the United States where we consider it appropriate to use silence. In fact, we sometimes use silence to emphasize things or to punctuate something that's important.

We even use it just to gather our thoughts because we consider it appropriate to speak in a more contained way, particularly in a professional setting. This means not raising our voices or interrupting others. If someone else starts to speak, we'll typically stop and listen.

That style could be interpreted as a bit colder or more dismissive. You might seem less engaged because you're not speaking in as volatile of a style; you're not showing your emotion as much.

There can be these types of cultural misunderstandings simply based on the way we take turns in a

conversation and how we use our voice in terms of volume and tone.

IN CONTEXT

High volume doesn't always mean anger, but that's how we might interpret it here in the United States in some contexts. There may be people who would interpret someone speaking loudly as being angry or upset, when the person may actually just be very engaged in the conversation.



HINT

Throughout these lessons we have been describing the American communication style, as though there is only one. Of course, there are dozens if not hundreds of different communication styles present in the United States! For instance, someone from Mississippi probably thinks that someone from New York talks too loudly and and too fast; someone from New York probably thinks that someone from Minnesota is too vague and ambiguous about their statements.



BIG IDEA

These cultural differences in non-verbal communication do exist, and it's important to be aware of them. Everyone has emotional and instantaneous gut reactions to these non-verbal cues, from tone and volume to the method of turn-taking in a conversation. What is culturally appropriate for each person becomes ingrained in him or her, so it's important to know that you have the tendency to react based on your own cultural experience.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about two more forms of non-verbal communication: **vocalics**, which pertains to the tone and volume of your speech, and **repartee**, or a style of conversation using short turn-taking. Some cultures have a longer turn-taking style, while others favor an overlapping style. You now understand that when people from different cultures with different methods of communication come together, **vocalics and repartee can present themselves in conflict**. Therefore, it's important to be aware of these differences; self-awareness is the first step in understanding how to communicate in a way that allows for cultural differences. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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Vocalics

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